



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Helda

Alternative Lenses for Qualitative Religion Research : Interstitial, Inverted, and Dialogical Approaches

Hjelm, Titus

Brill

2021-11-15

Hjelm, T 2021, 'Alternative Lenses for Qualitative Religion Research : Interstitial, Inverted, and Dialogical Approaches', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 267-283. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15700682-12341529>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/347479>

10.1163/15700682-12341529

cc_by_nc_nd

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

**Alternative Lenses for Qualitative Religion Research:
Inverted, Interstitial, and Dialogical Approaches**

Titus Hjelm

University of Helsinki
Department of Cultures
PO Box 59 (Unioninkatu 38)
00014 University of Helsinki
Finland
titus.hjelm@helsinki.fi

Abstract

This article explores new ways of looking at qualitative data in the study of religion. I call them the inverted, interstitial, and dialogical approaches. The interstitial approach provides an alternative to traditional triangulation by treating discrepancies between, say, self-reporting and observation of religious attendance not as a problem, but as an interstice where new information can be found. The inverted approach examines how discourses about “the other”—the other’s religion, in this case—enable researchers to analyse positive self-identifications, even when those are left unarticulated. Finally, the dialogical approach responds to a recurrent problem in qualitative religion research: researchers often assume that the ways in which people talk about religion have particular consequences. The dialogical approach enables researchers to demonstrate whether and how this is indeed so. The three approaches show how epistemological reframing—all three are, in different ways, constructionist approaches—enables novel thinking about “religion.”

Alternative Lenses for Qualitative Religion Research:

Inverted, Interstitial, and Dialogical Approaches

1 Introduction

The study of religion is not a discipline. It is a field of research in which scholars analyse phenomena they themselves, or the people they study, have designated as “religion”. The field also encompasses the study of cognate concepts, such as spirituality and worldviews, variously defined. Importantly, the study of religion also analyses what passes for “religion” (“spirituality,” “worldviews,” etc.) in academic and “lay” discourses. *How* you study these things, and which disciplines you employ in the endeavour is, open.

The consequence of this multi- and interdisciplinarity is that the study of religion is not methodologically dependent on any single approach considered most appropriate in a disciplinary tradition. In contrast, North American sociology and, consequently, sociology of religion is heavily quantitative, if judged by the two most important journals, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Sociology of Religion*. Ethnography, in turn, is the gold standard of anthropology and, consequently, anthropology of religion. However, the study of religion—in the broad sense I understand it—is not only multi-/interdisciplinary, but methodologically pluralistic.

As the pages of this journal attest, consciously or not, scholars of religion have taken this lesson to heart. Yet, multi-/interdisciplinarity and methodological pluralism do not necessarily protect against methodological calcification. In the everyday practice of research—the Kuhnian

“normal science”— true and tested techniques are recycled over and over again. This inhibits methodological innovation. Importantly, calcification does not only affect methods in the narrow sense of techniques of data gathering and analysis. Rather, deeper epistemological issues are at stake.

In this article, I’m going to suggest three ways to “flip” familiar data, so we can see it in a new way. Each of these arranges data differently than do our standard approaches. I ask: How can we reframe some of our basic methods for analysing text, talk, and practice in order to discover something that is left unseen, or remains implicit, in the more traditional ways of looking at phenomena designated as “religion”? As you will see, all three approaches come from a social constructionist context (Beckford 2003; Hjelm 2014a), though their usefulness is not limited to those who find that context compelling.

I call these three approaches inverted, interstitial, and dialogical. The inverted approach examines how discourses about “the other”—the other’s religion, in this case—enable us to analyse positive self-identifications, even when those are left unarticulated. What does a construction of their bad religion say about our good religion? The interstitial approach looks at the information that falls in the interstices of different types of data, for example in the discrepancy between self-reporting and observation of religious attendance. What does it *mean* that people say they attend church, but don’t? Finally, the dialogical approach offers a way of analysing how our ways of talking about religion affect the meaning of “religion” in different contexts. How can we assess these effects—effects which are often assumed, but rarely demonstrated, to exist?

None of the approaches I propose is novel as such. Neither are they meant as an exhaustive list of “alternative lenses,” nor suggested as a corrective to existing approaches (even when such approaches are given as contrasting examples to the alternatives). Some of the most profound *Heureka!*-moments in my career have been cases where innovative scholarship has

enabled me to look at familiar data with new eyes. It is in this spirit of flipping the perspective that these alternative lenses are offered here.

2 The Interstitial Approach: The Meaning of Discrepancy

The first approach, which I call *interstitial*, reimagines our standard practice of triangulating data. In this context, I use “triangulation” to refer to the use of different data and methods to cross-check the validity of research results (for other types of triangulation, see Denzin 2015). My point is that triangulation, in the traditional sense, misses large parts of the research story. By looking at the interstices of different data, alternative stories emerge.

Few people have described the tangible effects of triangulation as well as sociologist of religion Mark Chaves:

I do not have the literary skill to convey the drama of the evening in my office when I had in front of me all of these pieces of information – the counts from 18 dioceses, the percent Catholic in each diocese from the NSRI data, and the total population of each diocese from the 1990 U.S. census – and set about using my hand calculator to calculate a count-based church attendance rate for Catholics in these dioceses. Nor do I have the literary skill to convey the excitement I felt when, after a couple of hours, I pushed the “ = ” button on the calculator for the final time and saw the result: 28 percent weekly attendance rate, compared to a 50 percent Catholic attendance rate produced by conventional surveys at that time. Wow. I was staring at the same result – massive over-reporting – that Kirk [Hadaway] and Penny [Long Mahler] had found for Protestants in

Ashtabula [county]. I have never felt more like a scientist making a discovery than at that moment (Chaves 2013: 107).

Chaves' story is about counting church attendance, but it is a good example of how mixing data yields new discoveries. The same can be said about qualitative data, namely the mixing of interview and observation data.

Interviewing is now ubiquitous: David Silverman (2017) calls modern society an "interview society." Interviews dominate not only qualitative social science, but culture (news, entertainment) more broadly: "The elevation of interviews pursuing 'experience' as the Gold Standard of qualitative methods places researchers in an awkward competition not only with contemporary culture but also with other kinds of researchers" (Silverman 2017: 145). At the other end of the qualitative scale are ethnographers, who have traditionally privileged observation, because it enables a "deeper" understanding of individuals and communities:

Having arrived at our chosen site, we might conduct interviews and administer questionnaires, but our chief tool would be the gradual process of accommodating to, and being accepted by, our informants. ... The knowledge to be gained was not just about fact and figures; it was about crossing an experiential divide, learning what it felt like to be "them" (Coleman 2002: 76).

Asking about experiences is, according to ethnographers, preliminary at best. In their classic article on the topic, Becker and Geer argue that it is not simply a deeper or better access to experience at stake, but fact and falsities: "In short, participant observation makes it possible to check description against fact and, noting discrepancies, become aware of systematic distortions made by the person

under study; such distortions are less likely to be discovered by interviewing alone” (Becker & Geer 1957: 31).

This is the classic sense of “triangulation” in social research—“testing the reliability, validity, and generality of findings ... if the use of other methods turns up the same finding or result, then it is confirmed” (Layder 1992: 121; see Atkinson & Coffey 2003: 420–422). In the case of discrepancies, earlier findings may be discarded as aberrations. So, to take an example from the field of religion, Paula Nissilä (2018: 288), in her qualitative case study of a Revivalist Christian festival in Finland, explains:

Once, when asking some of the interviewees if the event could be viewed as comparable to a secular festival, the youths expressed the differences in meanings relating to attributes like noise and ‘running wild all night’ at secular festivals. However, as observed, these elements were also present at this event. On the last day, the organizers informed me that some young people attempted to access the roof of the building during the night.

Thus, in Nissilä’s example the difference between religious and secular festivals expressed in words disappears in observation.

This is where I would like to put on the alternative lenses: Instead of taking the triangulation road and treating discrepancies in findings from different data and/or method as a disconfirmation of one or the other, I would like to point the analytical gaze to the interstices between the data. What happens in the space where interviews and observations collide, where one data/method tells us one thing and another a different thing? What does it *mean* that people say one thing and do another?

Looking at Nissilä's study from an interstitial perspective, it is not interesting that the Revivalist Christian festival-goers misrepresented or even lied about the difference between secular and religious festivals. What is interesting is that they were saying something that they thought reflected the norms of the community, even if they did not follow the norms themselves. Or, to go back to Chaves' example in the beginning of this section, the question regarding church attendance is not only whether people go to church less frequently than they used to, but whether it has become more acceptable to *say* that they go to church less frequently than is expected (Hadaway, Mahler & Chaves 1993: 749–750). The interstitial approach does not, then, arbitrate between types of data, but offers insights into the culture of communities via a roundabout reading of the discrepancy between action and talk (see Swidler 1986).

Let me illustrate this further with a personal example. I used to begin my large social theory class by asking the students to write down everything they do between waking up and coming to the university. The usual list included things like having breakfast, taking a shower, brushing teeth, putting on makeup and, increasingly, checking social media. Then I proceeded to ask them what the things were they *absolutely* needed to do before coming to the university. The list usually narrowed down to drinking water and putting on clothes, but also included shaving and doing one's hair for some. By the time I asked them *why* they needed to put on clothes, they usually thought that they had chosen a course taught by a mad person. The point of the exercise was to show how many of our taken-for-granted actions are social conventions. Weather permitting, we *could* arrive in class naked, but that is not something we even contemplate, because it is considered socially inappropriate (Hjelm 2014a: 1–2).

Now, one thing that struck me back then and is instructive here, is that very few of my students ever used the toilet in the accounts they gave of their morning routines. Was it because they actually never used the toilet, or that they were lying about the issue? From the interstitial approach perspective neither is a relevant question. We can safely assume that every one of them

did, but what is interesting is that most either forgot to mention it, or thought it inappropriate to talk about the issue in class. The interstitial approach, in this instance, does not help us in decoding the patterns of students' morning routines, but it does tell us a lot about the social conventions dictating what belongs to a classroom. The interstitial approach looks familiar data into a new position, thus uncovering not readily apparent insights.

At the end of the day, the difference between triangulation in the traditional sense and the interstitial approach boils down to epistemology. For Becker and Geer, writing in the 1950s, "facts" and "distortions" were unproblematic concepts (Atkinson & Coffey 2003: 419). Because of this epistemological view, discrepancies between different data acquired with different methods can only be treated as a problem. Their solution was to privilege observation over interviews.

Treating both observations and interviews as unproblematic ways to access "truth" or what is "actually" happening is, of course, what reflexive ethnography and constructionist approaches to interviewing have, in their respective fields, been criticising for some time now (Atkinson & Coffey 2003). The epistemology of social science has moved on from Becker and Geer's days. But there is still a temptation to treat discrepancies between findings from different data or method used as a question of validity. To the interstitial approach, all data tells a story. It is the question that is different.

3 The Inverted Approach: They Are an Inverted Us

Sociologist Nilüfer Göle (2011: 388) has said perceptively that indifference towards religion is becoming increasingly difficult even for secularised Europeans in the 21st century. This is not, however, because of a sudden resurgence of religiosity, but rather because of the increasing identification of Europe's Muslim minority as a problem—and, specifically, a religious problem at that

(Hjelm 2011). It is Islam, the religion of the “other,” which makes indifference difficult (Lännström 2004). In many ways, Muslims have replaced Jews as the religious other in the European imagination (see Meer 2013). A wave of research on this othering—Islamophobia, if you will—has been published in the last two decades (e.g. Allen 2010; Morgan & Poynting 2012).

Needless to say, analysing the constructions of the religious other and the effects of these constructions is an important endeavour. However, by parking the car at what the constructions say about “bad” religion, this type of research misses what the constructions say about “good” religion. What I call an *inverted* approach, takes “the other” as its focus, but only to look at “the self” that emerges from the inversion of the negative construction. James Clifford (1986: 23), discussing the ethics of writing about ethnographical research, captures this sentiment beautifully: “It has become clear that every version of an ‘other’, wherever found, is also a construction of the ‘self’”.

The roots of this approach go back as far as Durkheim. In a well-known argument, which surprised and shocked his contemporaries, Durkheim (1982: 98) stated that crime is “an integrative element of any healthy society.” In his first major work, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), he explained how crime is, paradoxically, beneficial to society:

Crime therefore draws honest consciences together, concentrating them. We have only to observe what happens, particularly in a small town, when some scandal involving morality has just taken place. People stop each other on the street, call upon one another, meet in their customary places to talk about what has happened. A common indignation is expressed. From all the similar impressions exchanged and all the different expressions of wrath there rises up a single fount of anger, more or less clear-cut according to the particular case, anger which is that of everybody without being that of anybody in particular. It is public anger. (Durkheim 1984: 58).

Durkheim argued that the moral community achieves external reality (“that of everybody without being of anybody in particular”)—or becomes a “social fact”—in the process of (discursively) constructing the limits of morality (Hjelm 2014a: 53-4). Later scholars continued to develop the idea that negative images are inverted images of the community’s positive ideals.

This was perhaps best expressed in Kai Erikson’s *Wayward Puritans* (1966), which applied insights from the sociology of deviance to heresy and witchcraft cases in 17th century Massachusetts. In a key sentence, Erikson summarises the key insight of what I call here an inverted approach: “One of the surest ways to confirm an identity, for communities as well as for individuals, is to find some way of measuring what one is *not*” (Erikson 1966: 64. Emphasis in the original). Erikson calls this “boundary maintenance”:

A human community can be said to maintain boundaries, then, in the sense that its member tend to confine themselves to a particular radius of activity and to regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral. Thus the group retains a kind of cultural integrity (Erikson 1966: 10).

Mary Douglas makes a similar point in *Natural Symbols* (1996[1970]: 113), when she says that accusations of witchcraft in tribal societies are more than ways of identifying the bad: “The accusation is a righteous demand for conformity.” Studying “the good in the bad” becomes, then, an analysis of what the people constructing the negative images consider appropriate boundaries for religion and other social issues.

This was also the point of some scholars who pointed out the broader sociological implications of studying new religious movements (NRMs) back in the day when a lot of sociological attention was given to unconventional and controversial religious movements (Barker 1982; Beckford

1985: 11–12). For example, Eileen Barker noted that “if one had to select one criterion that might indicate the extent to which a society was ‘open’ or ‘closed’, the legal position of NRMs would be a not altogether ridiculous choice” (Barker 1999: 28). France’s measures against “sects” perceived as dangerous or subversive are an illuminating example of how a state-level actor defines “bad religion” and, by so doing, simultaneously constructs the appropriate space for religion in general (Palmer 2011). The same principle applies to research on different social institutions (politics, media, medicine, education, etc.) where this inverted boundary-maintenance is practiced.

It ought to be remembered, however, that reading the good from the bad is not a one-size-fits-all strategy automatically applicable to all situations. *What* exactly is being constructed inversely when, say, NRMs are being opposed? Earlier confrontations with emerging religious groups, such as the Mennonites and Mormons, had an element of retaining the religious status quo (Bromley & Shupe 1981), so the issue at stake was the religious boundaries of society. However, the post-1960s controversies have not been mainly about the beliefs of particular groups but rather their practices (Beckford 1985: 11), which are opposed on secular grounds, such as psychological or physical harm. In many ways human rights have replaced religious concerns as the focus of boundary maintenance constructions. The lesson here is that inverting negative constructions always requires knowledge of the broader historical and social context of those constructions. Further, I have focused on negative constructions and how they can be flipped to find something new. This is partly because, as Erikson said above, it is often easier to express what one is not rather than give a positive evaluation of yourself or your community. But the flip works the other way as well: what is constructed as positive always implies its opposite. Self-identification is, from an inverted perspective, always also a boundary-making performance.

Now, unlike the interstitial approach, which offered a constructionist twist on a naïve view of triangulation, the inverted approach starts from a constructionist epistemology. The “other” is a social construct. By treating the images of “bad religion” as constructions to begin with is to say

that it does not really matter whether they are accurate or truthful constructions. What is at stake is what the constructions *do* regardless of their veracity. Made-up claims can still have very real consequences. The inverted approach takes this one step further and suggests that focusing on the constructions of the other misses half of the story. By flipping the perspective, we can use the same data to examine how the self is implicitly constructed.

4 The Dialogical Approach: Instances vs. Sequences in Text and Talk

The interstitial approach introduced the idea of a constructionist flip which enables asking new questions from familiar data. The inverted approach is embedded in the constructionist framework, but flips the perspective further by asking what the positive mirror images of negative constructions are (and vice versa). The third, dialogical, approach is also embedded in constructionist epistemology, but tackles a perpetual problem in that framework: how can we know whether particular constructions are effective?

Steven Engler (2004) has argued that “social construction” is a much used but little theorised idea in the study of religion (see also Hjelm 2018: 169–173). The last twenty or so years have witnessed the emergence of a self-identifying “discursive study of religion” (DSR), which positions itself explicitly in constructionist epistemology. Although the field is diverse (Hjelm 2020a), the different approaches share the same premise: Text and talk are not naïve representations of “the world,” but partial (in both senses of the word) constructions of it. Neither are text and talk treated as pathways to underlying cognition or culture, but become the focus of analysis themselves. Discourse—the way we talk and write about the world—is treated as a social practice: What is interesting is not just what people say, but what they *do* when they say something (Hjelm 2011b; 2020; von Stuckrad 2010). DSR asks: What passes for “religion” in the media, politics, courts, and so on? This is not a trivial question. Indeed, it can be a question of life and death, as my PhD student

Helmi Halonen's research on the construction of "authentic" conversion to Christianity in asylum seekers' asylum applications demonstrates. If an applicant cannot convince the interviewer of the genuineness of their faith, the grounds for religious discrimination in the country of origin are not fulfilled and the person can be deported—potentially with lethal consequences.

However, there is a problem in many studies employing a discursive approach. As said above, the focus is on examining what is being done with what is said. This presupposes that discourse has effects, but studies often tend to assume rather than demonstrate these effects (Elder-Vass 2011; Hjelm 2014: 94–96). In the worst case, discourse research falls prey to the "fallacy of internalism," that is, reading the effects of discourse from the discourse itself (Thompson 1990). This seems to be a popular approach among far right critics of Islam, who love to quote Quran passages in order to explain why there are Muslim terrorists. Of course, what is always forgotten is that by that logic every Muslim who ever read the Quran should be a terrorist. The fact that people on the far right think that this *is* the case should not deter everyone else from observing that it is not. Further, by the same logic any reader of many parts of the Old Testament should be considered equally suspicious. The point is that in order to be able to assess the impact of discourse, we would need some sort of reception research, surveys, interviews or observation. This, in turn, seems to suggest that analysing discourse is rarely, if at all, sufficient for a comprehensive analysis by itself.

The question of discourse effects does not mean that analysing discourse is a trivial endeavour, but it does suggest that some methodological rethinking is required. The usual strategy for discursive research is to define the object of interest and then look for *instances* of that concept, word, or topic in the text corpus. In the study of religion, this can mean that we first define what "religion" encompasses, and then look for references that match that definition. Or, we can focus on what religion *becomes* in the text, by assessing how the boundaries of the concept are constructed. Making a useful distinction, Teemu Taira (2016) has called the first "religious discourse" and the second "discourse on religion".

David Silverman (2005) has suggested that instead of analysing instances of discourse, we should focus on *sequences* of discourse. This means examining earlier discourses that influenced the instance of discourse analysed, and the discourses that the instance of discourse influences in turn. The idea draws from discourse theory (and in Silverman's case, from conversation analysis) that highlights the dialogicality of text and talk. Going back to Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva's (1986) application of his ideas, the dialogical approach sees meaning as "an event occurring *between* people" (Lock & Strong 2010: 91. Emphasis in the original). Therefore, discourses have two basic properties: On the one hand, they always refer back to earlier discourses, because any message is more intelligible and effective if it is presented in a form that the recipient can recognise. On the other hand, discourses are always future-oriented, anticipating possible interpretations and counterarguments (Bahtin 1991: 68-71; Kristeva 1986: 39; Fairclough 1992: 101-103). The response to a particular instance of discourse can, hence, tell us about its effectiveness. Is it reproduced, countered, transformed, or silenced in the dialogical process? Altogether, the discourses in circulation within a particular genre (for example, broadsheet news) reveal what Judith Butler (1999: 23–24) calls the "matrix of intelligibility," or the limit within which it is possible to make effective articulations in the first place. Discursive power (Hjelm 2014b) is the ability to narrow the matrix of intelligibility: the unspeakable becomes the undoable. But, as Fairclough (1992: 36) reminds us, discursive power is also about broadening the matrix and so transforming, instead of just reproducing, effective discourses.

Now let me try to demonstrate how this crash course in discourse theory can be applied in practice. I will also show how a seemingly small methodological adjustment can have radical consequences for the ways in which we interpret discursive data. Recently, I analysed the speeches of Members of the Finnish parliament (MPs) in order to find out whether the often-heard claim about "the return of religion in the public sphere" (Hjelm 2015) applies to Finnish (parliamentary) politics. I specifically examined a debate in the parliament regarding equal marriage. As Lövheim et al. (2018) have noted, in the Nordic countries (and I would add, elsewhere as well) religion tends to

appear in political debates about gender equality and sexual rights. My case may be obscure for an international audience, but the methodological point remains regardless of political context.

What I found (Hjelm 2020b) from an analysis of this admittedly small case study was that if religion was spoken about, it was spoken in terms of religious institutions, especially the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. However, one MP from the far right The Finns Party—opposing the proposed equal marriage legislation—did exhort his MP colleagues to “recognise God’s will in this case.” Some of his fellow party members responded approvingly. I defined this justification of a political stance by reference to God (also, the Bible) as religious discourse, in distinction from discourse where religion is treated as an institution or a tradition, for example.

Now, if we took the common approach where analysts lift instances of discourses from the corpus, it would be difficult to argue that religion is *not* back in the political agenda. It is clearly there, in that one particular MP’s speeches and in some responses by his fellow party members. Of course, we could point to the minuscule proportion that religious discourse—as defined here—occupies in the whole debate, but counting occurrences provides the qualitative analyst only with a partial view to the efficacy of particular discourses. As Turner (1991: 59) points out, frequency should not be confused with social effects: “It cannot be assumed that beliefs and practices which are publicly available necessarily have significant effects in the upkeep of crucial social processes and social arrangements”.

If, however, we flip the data to consider discourses in sequence, the picture changes. There are some responses by proponents of equal marriage legislation explicitly asserting that the issue here is not about religion, that no-one’s religious rights are threatened here. But, mostly and most importantly, there was simply no response at all. Now, silence may mean agreement on a personal level, but the fact that MPs did not consider religious discourse to be an appropriate response in the context of parliamentary debate means that the matrix of intelligibility in the Finnish Parliament is a secular one. Thus, if one looks at instances of discourse, religion can be argued to be

“back” in terms of religious justifications of parliamentary discourse. Looking at sequences of discourse, however, shows that religious discourse is a losing strategy for justifying a political position.

Epistemologically, the dialogical approach—like DSR in general—starts from the constructionist premise. If, however, we want to take seriously the constructionist exhortation to treat discourse as a social practice with social effects, we need to go beyond assuming these effects. One way of doing this is the kind of traditional triangulation of data. If we assume that sermons in a church have an effect on the attitudes of congregation members, we can test this with attitude scales. However, it is also possible to look at discourse effects within the constructionist framework by dialogically examining the ways in which the sermon’s discourse is reproduced or transformed by the congregation. Sometimes, as I have argued above, flipping the lens from instances to sequences of discourse produces opposite interpretations of the same data.

5 Conclusion

In this brief text I have provided a teaser, a minimum account of three alternative lenses to religion research. The point has been to whet the appetite, whether for applying the three approaches to empirical research, or for challenging the ideas presented here. Obviously, I do not claim or demand any sort of methodological primacy to any of these approaches, nor for the broader constructionist epistemology that the three approaches represent. But in some cases, depending on our research interests, the same data can be made to speak a different language simply by putting on slightly different lenses, or flipping a methodological switch, to use a less ocular analogy.

This reuse of data is one very pragmatic benefit of these alternative approaches. It has been more than once when a student’s stalled research project has been rekindled with changing the

approach to the data. The other, more profound issue is that as religion scholars, we often tend to look for religion in rather obvious places. This can be both the cause *and* the consequence of a naïve, unproblematised view of “religion” itself. These alternative approaches, at the very least, sensitise researchers to the idea that “religion”—or issues relevant to whatever passes for religion in a given context—can be found, and should be sought, in unexpected places.

As suggested in the introduction, my choice of three approaches does not claim to be an exhaustive list. The three were chosen because at different stages of my own career I have found them useful for discovering perspectives on religion that I would have missed using more traditional approaches. As repeatedly said above, what is at stake is less about technical recalibration and more about an epistemological reframing. This is also demonstrated by the fact that the three approaches do not simply give us different or “better” answers, but rather enable us to ask new questions.

References

Allen, Chris (2010). *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Atkinson, Paula & Amanda Coffey (2003). Revisiting the Relationship between Participant Observation and Interviews. In: J.A. Holstein & J.F. Gubrium (eds), *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 415–428.

Bahtin, Mihail (1991). *Dostojevskin poetiikan ongelmia*. Translated into Finnish by Paula Nieminen & Tapani Laine. Helsinki: Orient Express.

Barker, Eileen (ed.) (1982). *New Religious Movements: A Perspective for Understanding Society*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.

Barker, Eileen (1999). New religious Movements: Their Incidence and Significance. In: B. Wilson & J. Cresswell (eds), *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response*. London: Routledge, pp. 15–31.

Becker, Howard S. & Blanche Geer (1957). Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison. *Human Organization* 16 (3), p. 28–32.

Beckford, James A. (1985). *Cult Controversies: The Societal Response to New Religious Movements*. London: Tavistock.

Beckford, James A. (2003). *Social Theory and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bromley, David G. & Anson D. Shupe (1981). *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Butler, Judith (1999). *Gender Trouble*. Second Edition. London: Routledge.

Chaves, Mark (2013). Serendipity in the Study of Religion and Society. In: T. Hjelm & P. Zuckerman (eds), *Studying Religion and Society: Sociological Self-Portraits*. London: Routledge, pp. 105–115.

Clifford, James (1986). Introduction: Partial Truths. In: J. Clifford & G. Marcus (eds), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp 1–26.

Coleman, Simon (2002). “But Are They Really Christian?” Contesting Knowledge and Identity in and out of the Field. In: J.V. Spickard, J.S. Landres & M.B. McGuire (eds), *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 75–87.

Denzin, Norman K. (2015). Triangulation. In: George Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. DOI: 10.1002/9781405165518.wbeost050.pub2

Douglas, Mary (1996[1970]). *Natural Symbols*. London: Routledge.

Durkheim, Émile (1982[1895]). *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Translated by W.D. Halls. New York: The Free Press.

Durkheim, Émile (1984[1893]). *The Division of Labour in Society*. Translated by W.D. Halls. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Elder-Vass, Dave (2011). The Causal Power of Discourse. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 41 (2), p. 143–160.

Engler, Steven (2004). Constructionism versus What? *Religion* 34 (4), p. 291–313.

Erikson, Kai T. (1966). *The Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Fairclough, Norman (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Oxford: Polity Press.

Göle, Nilüfer (2011). The Public Visibility of Islam and European Politics of Resentment: The Minarets-Mosques Debate. *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37 (4), p. 383–392.

Hadaway, C. Kirk, Penny Long Marler & Mark Chaves (1993). What the Polls Don't Show: A Closer Look at U.S. Church Attendance. *American Sociological Review* 58 (6), p. 741–752.

Hjelm, Titus (ed.) (2011a). *Religion and Social Problems*. New York: Routledge.

Hjelm, Titus (2011b). Discourse Analysis. In: S. Engler & M. Stausberg (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion*. London: Routledge, pp. 134–150.

Hjelm, Titus (2014a). *Social Constructionisms: Approaches to the Study of the Human World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hjelm, Titus (2014b). Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion. *Critical Sociology* 40 (6), p. 855–872.

Hjelm, Titus (2018). Assessing the Influence of *The Sacred Canopy*: A Missed Opportunity for Social Constructionism? In: Titus Hjelm (ed.), *Peter L. Berger and The Sociology of Religion: 50 Years after The Sacred Canopy*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Hjelm, Titus (2020a). Mapping the Discursive Study of Religion. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*.

Hjelm, Titus (2020b). Uskonnon ”paluu” eduskuntapolitiikkaan: Desekularisaatiota vai metodologinen harha? *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 125 (3), 250–265.

Kristeva, Julia (1986). Word, Dialogue and Novel. In: Toril Moi, (ed.), *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, pp. 34–61.

Lännström, Anna (2004). Introduction. In: A. Lännström (ed.), *The Stranger’s Religion: Fascination and Fear*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, pp. 1–10.

Layder, Derek (1993). *New Strategies in Social Research*. Cambridge: Polity.

Locke, Andy & Tom Strong (2010). *Social Constructionism: Sources and Stirrings in theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lövheim, Mia & Jonas Lindberg & Pål K. Botvar & Henrik R. Christensen & Kati Niemelä & Anders Bäckström (2018). Religion on the Political Agenda. In: Inger Furseth (ed.), *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 137–191.

Meer, Nasar (2013). Semantics, Scales and Solidarities in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia. *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 36 (3), p. 500–515.

Morgan, George & Scott Poynting (eds.) (2012). *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Nissilä, Paula (2018). Young People at a Revivalist Summer Gathering: Rituals, Liminality, and Emotions. *Social Compass* 65 (2), p. 278–294.

Palmer, Susan J. (2011). *The New Heretics of France: Minority Religions, la République, and the Government-Sponsored "War on Sects"*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Silverman, David (2005). Instances or Sequences? Improving the State of the Art of Qualitative Research. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 6 (3), np. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-6.3.6>.

Silverman, David (2017). How Was It For You? The Interview Society and the Irresistible Rise of the (Poorly Analyzed) Interview. *Qualitative Research* 17 (2), p. 144–158.

Swidler, Ann (1986). Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies. *American Sociological Review* 51 (2), p. 273–286.

Taira, Teemu (2016). Discourse on "Religion" in Organizing Social Practices: Theoretical and Methodological Considerations. In: F. Wijsen & K. von Stuckrad (eds), *Making Religion: Theory and Practice in the Discursive Study of Religion*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 125–146.

Thompson, John B. (1990). *Ideology and Modern Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Towler, Robert (ed.) (1995). *New Religions and the New Europe*. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press.

von Stuckrad, Kocku (2010). Reflections on the Limits of Reflection: An Invitation to the Discursive Study of Religion. *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 22 (2/3), p. 156–169.